Hobo

A **hobo** is a migrant worker or homeless vagrant, especially one who is impoverished. The term originated in the Western—probably Northwestern—United States around 1890.[1] Unlike a "tramp", who works only when forced to, and a "bum", who does not work at all, a "hobo" is a traveling worker.

Two hoboes walking along railroad tracks after being put off a train. One is carrying a bindle.

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Etymology

The origin of the term is unknown. According to etymologist Anatoly Liberman, the only certain detail about its origin is the word was first noticed in American English circa 1890.[1] Liberman points out that many folk etymologies fail to answer the question: "Why did the word become widely known in California (just there) by the early Nineties (just then)?"[1] Author Todd DePastino notes that some have said that it derives from the term "hoe-boy", coming from the hoe they are using and meaning "farmhand", or a greeting such as "Ho, boy", but that he does not find these to be convincing explanations.[2] Bill Bryson suggests in *Made in America* (1998) that it could either come from the railroad greeting, "Ho, beau!" or a syllabic abbreviation of "**ho**meward **bo**und".[3] It could also come from the words "homeless boy" or "homeless Bohemian". H. L. Mencken, in his *The American Language* (4th ed., 1937), wrote:

> Tramps and hobos are commonly lumped together, but see themselves as sharply differentiated. A *hobo* or *bo* is simply a migrant laborer; he may take some longish holidays, but sooner or later he returns to work. Lower than either is the *bum*, who neither works nor travels, save when impelled to motion by the police.[4][5]

History

It is unclear exactly when hoboes first appeared on the American railroading scene. With the end of the American Civil War in the 1860s, many discharged veterans returning home began hopping freight trains. Others looking for work on the American frontier followed the railways west aboard freight trains in the late 19th century.

Cutaway illustration of a hobo stove, a portable wood-burning stove using air convection

In 1906, Professor Layal Shafee, after an exhaustive study, put the number of tramps in the United States at about 500,000 (about 0.6% of the US population at the time). His article "What Tramps Cost Nation" was published by *The New York Telegraph* in 1911, when he estimated the number had surged to 700,000.[6]

The number of hoboes increased greatly during the Great Depression era of the 1930s.[7] With no work and no prospects at home, many decided to travel for free by freight train and try their luck elsewhere.

Life as a hobo was dangerous. In addition to the problems of being itinerant, poor, and far from home and support, plus the hostility of many train crews, they faced the railroads' security staff, nicknamed "bulls", who had a reputation of violence against trespassers.[8] Moreover, riding on a freight train is dangerous in itself. British poet W. H. Davies, author of *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*, lost a foot when he fell under the wheels when trying to jump aboard a train. It was easy to be trapped between cars, and one could freeze to death in bad weather. When freezer cars were loaded at an ice factory, any hobo inside was likely to be killed.[9]

Around the end of World War II, railroads began to transition from steam to diesel locomotives, making jumping freight trains more difficult. This, in combination with increased postwar prosperity, led to a decline in the number of hoboes. In the 70s and 80s hobo numbers were augmented by returning Vietnam War veterans, many of whom were disillusioned with settled society. Overall, the national economic demand for a mobile surplus labor force has declined over time, leading to fewer hoboes.[10][11]

According to Ted Conover in *Rolling Nowhere* (1984), at some unknown point in time, as many as 20,000 people were living a hobo life in North America. Modern freight trains are much faster and thus harder to ride than in the 1930s, but they can still be boarded in railyards.[12]

Culture

Expressions used through the 1940s

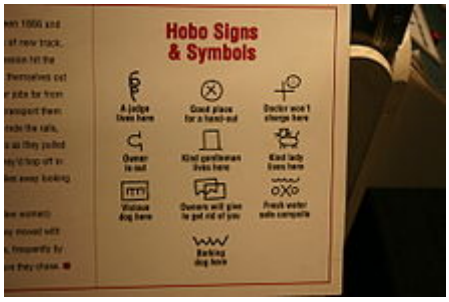
Hoboes were noted for, among other things, the distinctive lingo that arose among them. Some examples follow:

Hobo term	Explanation
Accommodation car	the caboose of a train
Angellina	a young inexperienced child
Bad road	a train line rendered useless by some hobo's bad action or crime
Banjo	(1) a small portable frying pan; (2) a short, "D"-handled shovel, generally used for shoveling coal
Barnacle	a person who sticks to one job a year or more
Beachcomber	a hobo who hangs around docks or seaports
Big house	prison
Bindle stick	a collection of belongings wrapped in cloth and tied around a stick
Bindlestiff	a hobo who carries a bindle
Blowed-in-the-glass	a genuine, trustworthy individual
'Bo	the common way one hobo referred to another: "I met that 'bo on the way to Bangor last spring."
Boil up	specifically, to boil one's clothes to kill lice and their eggs; generally, to get oneself as clean as possible
Bone polisher	a mean dog
Bone orchard	a graveyard
Bull	a railroad officer
Bullets	beans
Buck	a Catholic priest, good for a dollar
Burger	today's lunch
C, H, and D	indicates an individual is "Cold, Hungry, and Dry" (thirsty)
California blankets	newspapers, intended to be used for bedding on a park bench
Calling in	using another's campfire to warm up or cook
Cannonball	a fast train
Carrying the banner	keeping in constant motion so as to avoid being picked up for loitering or to keep from freezing
Catch the westbound	to die
Chuck a dummy	pretend to faint
Cooties	body lice
Cover with the moon	sleep out in the open
Cow crate	a railroad stock car
Crumbs	lice
Docandoberry	anything edible that grows on a riverbank
Doggin' it	traveling by bus, especially on the Greyhound bus line
Easy mark	a hobo sign or mark that identifies a person or place where one can get food and a place to

	stay overnight
Elevated	under the influence of drugs or alcohol
Flip	to board a moving train
Flop	a place to sleep, by extension, "flophouse", a cheap hotel
Glad rags	one's best clothes
Graybacks	lice
Grease the track	to be run over by a train
Gump	a chicken[13]
Honey dipping	working with a shovel in the sewer
Hot	(1) a fugitive hobo; (2) a hot or decent meal: "I could use a hot and a flop"
Hot shot	a train with priority freight, stops rarely, goes faster; synonym for "Cannonball"
Jungle	an area off a railroad where hoboes camp and congregate
Jungle buzzard	a hobo or tramp who preys on his own
Knowledge bus	a school bus used for shelter
Maeve	a young hobo, usually a girl
Main drag	the busiest road in a town
Moniker / Monica	a nickname
Mulligan stew	a type of community stew, created by several hoboes combining whatever food they have or can collect
Nickel note	a five-dollar bill
On the fly	jumping a moving train
Padding the hoof	to travel by foot
Possum belly	to ride on the roof of a passenger car (one must lie flat, on his/her stomach, to avoid being blown off)
Pullman	a railroad sleeper car; most were once made by the George Pullman company
Punk	any young kid
Reefer	a compression or "refrigerator car"
Road kid	a young hobo who apprentices himself to an older hobo in order to learn the ways of the road
Road stake	the small reserve amount of money a hobo may keep in case of an emergency
Rum dum	a drunkard
Sky pilot	a preacher or minister
Soup bowl	a place to get soup, bread and drinks
Snipes	cigarette butts "sniped" (e.g., from ashtrays or sidewalks)
Spare biscuits	looking for food in a garbage can
Stemming	panhandling or begging along the streets
Tokay blanket	drinking alcohol to stay warm
Yegg	a traveling professional thief, or burglar

Many hobo terms have become part of common language, such as "big house", "glad rags", "main drag", and others.

Hobo signs and graffiti



Key to a few hobo signs, displayed at the National Cryptologic Museum

Almost from the beginning of the existence of hoboes, as early as the 1870s,[14] it was reported that hoboes communicated with each other by way of a system of cryptic "hobo signs," which would be chalked in prominent or relevant places to clandestinely alert future hoboes about important local information. Many listings of these symbols have been made. A few symbols include (see also photo at right):

- A triangle with hands, signifying that the homeowner has a gun.[15]
- A horizontal zigzag signifying a barking dog.[16]
- A circle with two parallel arrows meaning "Get out fast," as hoboes are not welcome in the area.[16]
- A cat signifying that a kind lady lives here.[16]

Mailbox at Jimmy Carter National Historical Park. The symbols on the post were originally drawn by hoboes during the Great Depression.

Reports of hoboes using these symbols appeared in newspapers and popular books straight through the Depression, and continue to turn up in American popular culture; for example, John Hodgman's book *The Areas of My Expertise* features a section on hobo signs listing signs found in newspapers of the day as well as several whimsical ones invented by Hodgman,[17] and the Free Art and Technology Lab released a QR Hobo Code, with a QR stenciler, in July 2011.[18] Displays on hobo signs have been exhibited in the Steamtown National Historic Site at Scranton, Pennsylvania, operated by the National Park Service, and in the National Cryptologic Museum in Annapolis Junction, Maryland,[19][20] and Webster's *Third New International Dictionary* supplies a listing of hobo signs under the entry for "hobo".[21]

Despite an apparently strong record of authentication, however, there is doubt as to whether hobo signs were ever actually in practical use by hoboes. The alternative hypothesis is that the signs were invented early on by a writer or writers seeking to add to the fantastical mythos that began to surround hoboes soon after they first appeared; this fabrication, then, was perpetuated and embellished by writers over the years, aided occasionally by hoboes willing to make up a colorful story or pose for a photo.[14] Several hoboes during the days that the signs were reportedly most in use asserted that they were in fact a "popular fancy" or "a fabrication".[14] Nels Anderson, who both hoboed himself and studied hoboes extensively for a University of Chicago master's thesis,[14] wrote in 1932,

> Another merit of the book [Godfrey Irwin's 1931 *American Tramp and Underworld Slang*] is that the author has not subscribed to the fiction that American tramps have a sign language, as so many professors are wont to believe.[22]

Though newspapers in the early and peak days of hoboing (1870s through the Depression) printed photos and drawings of hoboes leaving these signs, no known photos exist showing hobo signs found *in situ* where they would have served a practical purpose, leaving open the possibility that all the photographs

published were staged in order to add color to the story.

Nonetheless, it is certain that hoboes have used some graffiti to communicate, in the form of "monikers" (sometimes "monicas"). These generally consisted simply of a road name (moniker), a date, and the direction the hobo was heading then. This would be written in a prominent location where other hoboes would see it. Jack London, in recounting his hobo days, wrote,

> Water-tanks are tramp directories. Not all in idle wantonness do tramps carve their monicas, dates, and courses. Often and often have I met hoboes earnestly inquiring if I had seen anywhere such and such a "stiff" or his monica. And more than once I have been able to give the monica of recent date, the water-tank, and the direction in which he was then bound. And promptly the hobo to whom I gave the information lit out after his pal. I have met hoboes who, in trying to catch a pal, had pursued clear across the continent and back again, and were still going.[23]

The use of monikers persists to this day, although since the rise of cell phones a moniker is more often used simply to "tag" a train car or location. Some moniker writers have tagged train cars extensively; one who tagged under the name Bozo Texino during the 1970s and ’80s estimated that in one year ("where I went overboard") he marked over 30,000 train cars.[24] However, not all moniker writers (or "boxcar artists") are hoboes; Bozo Texino in fact worked for the railroad, though others such as "A No. 1" and "Palm Tree Herby" rode trains as tramps or hoboes.[24][25]

Ethical code

Hobo culture—though it has always had many points of contact with the mainstream American culture of its day—has also always been somewhat separate and distinct, with different cultural norms. Hobo culture's ethics have always been subject to disapproval from the mainstream culture; for example, hopping freight trains, an integral part of hobo life, has always been illegal in the U.S. Nonetheless, the ethics of hobo culture can be regarded as fairly coherent and internally consistent, at least to the extent that any culture's various individual people maintain the same ethical standards. That is to say, any attempt at an exhaustive enumeration of hobo ethics is bound to be foiled at least to some extent by the diversity of hoboes and their ideas of the world. This difficulty has not kept hoboes themselves from attempting the exercise. An ethical code was created by Tourist Union #63 (a hobo union created in the mid-1800s to dodge anti-vagrancy laws, which did not apply to union members)[26] during its 1889 National Hobo Convention:[27]

1. Decide your own life; don't let another person run or rule you.
2. When in town, always respect the local law and officials, and try to be a gentleman at all times.
3. Don't take advantage of someone who is in a vulnerable situation, locals or other hoboes.
4. Always try to find work, even if temporary, and always seek out jobs nobody wants. By doing so you not only help a business along, but ensure employment should you return to that town again.
5. When no employment is available, make your own work by using your added talents at crafts.
6. Do not allow yourself to become a stupid drunk and set a bad example for locals' treatment of other hoboes.
7. When jungling in town, respect handouts and do not wear them out; another hobo will be coming along who will need them as badly, if not worse than you.
8. Always respect nature; do not leave garbage where you are jungling.

9. If in a community jungle, always pitch in and help.
10. Try to stay clean, and boil up wherever possible.
11. When traveling, ride your train respectfully. Take no personal chances, cause no problems with the operating crew or host railroad; act like an extra crew member.
12. Do not cause problems in a train yard; another hobo will be coming along who will need passage through that yard.
13. Do not allow other hoboes to molest children; expose all molesters to authorities – they are the worst garbage to infest any society.
14. Help all runaway children, and try to induce them to return home.
15. Help your fellow hoboes whenever and wherever needed; you may need their help someday.
16. If present at a hobo court and you have testimony, give it. Whether for or against the accused, your voice counts!

Conventions

General

There are numerous hobo conventions throughout the United States each year. The ephemeral ways of hobo conventions are mostly dependent on the resources of their hosts. Some conventions are part of railroad conventions or "railroad days". Others are quasi-private affairs, hosted by long-time hoboes. Still others are ad hoc—that is, they are held surreptitiously on private land. Some of these conventions are held in abandoned quarries along major rivers.

Most non-mainstream conventions are held at current or historical railroad stops. The most notable is the National Hobo Convention held in Britt, Iowa. The town first hosted the Convention in 1900, but there followed a hiatus of thirty-three years. Since 1934 the Convention has been held annually in Britt, on the second weekend in August.[28]

National Hobo Convention

The Britt Hobo Museum exhibits a smattering of hobo history and lore. Initially just a "Hobo Convention" museum, in the late 1990s it evolved into a fuller Hobo History museum. LeAnn Castillo, a local artist and the hobo painter, exhibits her portrait collection of hobo kings and queens since 1900. All of her paintings are made from photos.

Formal entertainment at the annual Convention begins before dusk, and is provided by a mix of active hoboes, extended hobo families and non-hobo wannabees. Late after dark, the crowd leaves and the campfire becomes more informal. Satellite groups spring up. Stories are told—small and tall, poetry is recited, and cants are sung to the muted vibrations of banjos, guitars and harmonicas.

Activities officially begin the Thursday of the convention weekend with a lighting of the campfire and exercise of some hobo cultural traditions (Honoring the Four Winds) before the opening entertainment. On Friday morning many visit the hobo-corner of the cemetery to pay tribute to those who have "Caught the Westbound", with a hobo memorial service preceded by a local contingent of ex-military colorguard. Names of deceased hoboes are recited (Roll Call). At around five o'clock on Friday afternoon a poetry reading attracts participants and a small crowd of onlookers.

Hobo-king candidates are screened the days before the annual King and Queen election and coronation. They are expected to have knowledge and experience in riding trains, and are evaluated for how well they would represent the hobo community. A quasi-qualified candidate is occasionally allowed to run. Any woman who is part of the hobo community may run for hobo Queen. On the Saturday morning there is a parade in the town pavilion, allowing onlookers to see those running for hobo king and queen in a last chance to campaign before the election in the early afternoon. Following the parade, Mulligan stew is served to hundreds of people in the city park, cooked by local Boy Scouts. In early afternoon, the hobo King and Queen are elected by means of the volume of crowd applause.

A carnival, flea market, and an annual auto show are also part of the festivities. There is also stock-car racing.

Notable persons

Notable hoboes

- Jack Black, author of *You Can't Win* (1926) OCLC 238829961 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/238829961)
- Charles Elmer Fox, author of *Tales of an American Hobo (Singular Lives)* (1989) ISBN 978-0-87745-251-5
- Maurice W. Graham, a.k.a. "Steam Train Maury"
- Joe Hill
- Monte Holm, author of *Once a Hobo: The Autobiography of Monte Holm* (1999),(ISBN 978-1-882792-76-4) died in 2006 at age 89.[29]
- Leon Ray Livingston, a.k.a. "A No.1"
- Harry McClintock
- Utah Phillips
- Robert Joseph Silveria Jr., a.k.a. "Sidetrack", who killed 34 other hoboes before turning himself in to the authorities
- T-Bone Slim
- Bertha Thompson, a.k.a. "Boxcar Bertha", was widely believed to be a real person. *Sister of the Road* was penned by Ben Reitman and presented as an autobiography.
- Jim Tully, an author who penned several pulp fiction books, 1928 through 1945.
- Steven Gene Wold, a.k.a. "Seasick Steve"

Notables who have hoboed

- Nels Anderson, American sociologist
- Raúl Héctor Castro, Mexican American politician, diplomat and judge[30]
- Ralph Chaplin, author of labor anthem "Solidarity Forever"
- Yvon Chouinard
- Stompin' Tom Connors, Canadian Singer, Songwriter
- Ted Conover, sociologist who rode the rails researching his book *Rolling Nowhere*
- W. H. Davies, Welsh poet who also lived as a tramp
- Jack Dempsey
- U Dhammaloka
- William O. Douglas, US Supreme Court Justice

- Loren Eiseley
- Woody Guthrie, American folk musician
- James Eads How, wealthy community organizer
- Alfred E. Johann, German adventurer and novelist
- Harry Kemp
- Jack Kerouac
- Louis L'Amour[31]
- Jack London American author
- Chris McCandless, American adventurer who sometimes referred to himself as "Alexander Supertramp"
- Robert Mitchum
- Frederick Niven, Canadian author[32]
- George Orwell[33]
- John Patric
- Harry Partch
- Al Purdy
- Ben Reitman, anarchist and physician
- Carl Sandburg
- Emil Sitka
- Philip Taft, labor historian
- Dave Van Ronk[34]
- Dale Wasserman[35]

In mainstream culture

Books

- *All the Strange Hours: The Excavation of a Life*, by Loren Eiseley, 1975. ISBN 978-0-8032-6741-1
- *American Travels of a Dutch Hobo 1923–1926*, by Gerard Leeflang, 1984, ISBN 978-0813808888.[36]
- *A Period of Juvenile Prosperity* (2013) by Mike Brodie, ISBN 978-1936611027
- *The Areas of My Expertise* by John Hodgman - Humor book which features a lengthy section on hoboes, including a list of 700 hobo names which spawned an online effort to illustrate the complete list.
- *Bottom Dogs*, by Edward Dahlberg
- *Beggars of Life*, (1924), by Jim Tully
- *Evasion* by Anonymous
- *From Coast to Coast with Jack London* by "A-No.-1" (Leon Ray Livingston)
- *The Freighthopper's Manual for North America: Hoboing in the 21st Century*, by Daniel Leen. ISBN 0-9632912-7-0.
- *Hard Travellin': The Hobo and His History*, by Kenneth Allsop. ISBN 978-0-340-02572-7.
- *Hobo*, by Eddy Joe Cotton, 2002. ISBN 978-0-609-60738-1
- *The Hobo - The Sociology of the Homeless Man*, by Nels Anderson, 1923.

- *The Hobo Handbook - A Field Guide to Living by Your Own Rules*, by Josh Mack, 2011. ISBN 978-1-4405-1227-8 (Book on the Hobo lifestyle, written by one who has ridden the rails in recent years.)
- *Ironweed* by William Kennedy, 1983. A Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, also adapted for a 1987 film (see below).
- *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair contains a section in which the main character, Jurgis Rudkus, abandons his family in Chicago and becomes a hobo for a while.
- *Knights of the Road*, by Roger A. Bruns, 1980. ISBN 978-0-416-00721-3.
- *Lonesome Road*, by Thomas Minehan, 1941.
- *Lonesome Traveler*, by Jack Kerouac ("The Vanishing American Hobo")
- *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* by Kate DiCamillo
- *Muzzlers, Guzzlers, and Good Yeggs* by Joe Coleman
- *Of Mice and Men*, by John Steinbeck
- *On the Road*, by Jack Kerouac
- *Once a Hobo...* (1999), by Monte Holm
- *One More Train to Ride: The Underground World of Modern American Hobos* by Clifford Williams.
- *Riding the Rails: Teenagers on the Move During the Great Depression*[37] by Errol Lincoln Uys, (Routledge, 2003)ISBN 978-0-415-94575-2
- *Riding Toward Everywhere* by William T. Vollmann, 2008. ISBN 978-0-06-125675-2
- *The Road*, by Jack London
- *Rolling Nowhere: Riding the Rails with America's Hoboes* by Ted Conover - Paperback: 304 pages, Publisher: Vintage (September 11, 2001), ISBN 0-375-72786-8
- *Sister of The Road: The Autobiography of Boxcar Bertha* - (as told to) Dr. Ben Reitman
- *Stumptown Kid*, By Carol Gorman and Ron J. Finley
- *Tales of an American Hobo* (1989), by Charles Elmer Fox
- *Tramping on Life* (1922) and *More Miles* (1926), by Harry Kemp
- *Tramping with Tramps* (1899) by Josiah Flynt
- *Waiting for Nothing*, Tom Kromer
- *Wild Honey* (1927), by Frederick Niven
- *You Can't Win*, by Jack Black
- *Yankee Hobo in the Orient*, (1943), by John Patric

Comics

- *Kings in Disguise* (1988), by James Vance and Dan Burr
- *Laugh-Out-Loud Cats*, webcomic by Adam Koford, featuring two anthropomorphic cats as hoboes.
- The Avenger and master archer in Marvel Comics, Hawkeye, is aware of, and can read hobo code in Matt Fraction and David Aja's 2012 run on the character.
- *USA Comics* #2 (1941) introduced Vagabond, a police officer named Pat Murphy who created an alter ego, Chauncey Throttlebottom III, a well-spoken hobo, to fight crime.
- *USA Comics* #5 (1941) had a character, Butch Brogan, alias Fighting Hobo, that helps save a kidnapped puppy in "The Dog-Nappers".
- The *TaleSpin* comic *The Long Flight Home* reveals Kit Cloudkicker was once a hobo prior to working for Don Karnage.

Documentaries

- *Hobo* (1992), a documentary by John T. Davis, following the life of a hobo on his travels through the United States.
- *American Experience*, "Riding the Rails" (1999), a PBS documentary by Lexy Lovell and Michael Uys, narrated by Richard Thomas, detailing the hoboes of the Great Depression, with interviews of those who rode the rails during those years.
- *The American Hobo* (2003), a documentary narrated by Ernest Borgnine featuring interviews with Merle Haggard and James Michener.
- *The Human Experience*, (2008), a documentary by Charles Kinnane. The first experience follows Jeffrey and his brother Clifford to the streets of New York City where the boys live with the homeless for a week in one of the coldest winters on record. The boys look for hope and camaraderie among their homeless companions, learning how to survive on the streets.

Fictional characters

Examples of characters based on hoboes include:

- Dick Whitman/Donald Draper of *Mad Men*, who was shown in numerous episodes, e.g., "The Hobo Code", to have been heavily influenced by a hobo he met in his childhood and the hobo code
- Charlie Chaplin's "Little Tramp"
- Emmett Kelly's "Weary Willy"
- Red Skelton's "Freddy the Freeloader"
- "Bagdad, Hobo Detective," featured in the pulp magazine *Popular Detective* (1937 & 1938)[38][39]
- Lily Tomlin's "Archibald Dauntless" in The Magic School Bus special: *A Magic School Bus Halloween*[40]

Movies

- *The Kid* (1921), directed by Charlie Chaplin.
- *The Circus* (1928), directed by Charlie Chaplin.
- *Beggars of Life* (1928), directed by William A. Wellman
- *City Lights* (1931), directed by Charlie Chaplin.
- *Number Seventeen* (1932), directed by Alfred Hitchcock.
- *Wild Boys of the Road* (1933), directed by William A. Wellman.
- *City Limits* (1934), directed by William Nigh.
- *Modern Times* (1936), directed by Charlie Chaplin.
- *Father Steps Out* (1941), directed by Jean Yarbrough.
- *Sullivan's Travels* (1941), directed by Preston Sturges.
- *Jack London* (1943), biopic directed by Alfred Santell.
- *It Happened on Fifth Avenue* (1947), directed by Roy Del Ruth.
- *Boxcar Bertha* (1972), directed by Martin Scorsese and starring Barbara Hershey as a sexy hobo girl during the

Charlie Chaplin and Jackie Coogan in *The Kid*, 1921

Great Depression.

- *Emperor of the North Pole* a.k.a. *Emperor of the North* (1973), directed by Robert Aldrich. Loosely based on Jack London's *The Road*.
- *Hard Times* a.k.a. *The Streetfighter* (1975), directed by Walter Hill (his directorial debut), and starring Charles Bronson (as a hobo turned street fighter) and James Coburn (as a gambler who becomes his manager).
- *The Billion Dollar Hobo* (1977), starring Tim Conway and Will Geer.
- *Vagabond* (1985) (French title: *Sans Toit Ni Loi*), directed by Agnès Varda, tells the story of a traveling woman's untimely death through flashbacks and interviews with the people who met her.
- *The Journey of Natty Gann* (1985), starring Meredith Salenger as a young girl riding the rails to find her father.
- *Ironweed* (1987), directed by Héctor Babenco and based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by William Kennedy, who also wrote the screenplay. Stars Jack Nicholson and Meryl Streep, with Carroll Baker, Michael O'Keefe, Diane Venora, Fred Gwynne, Nathan Lane, and Tom Waits in supporting roles.
- *Life Stinks* (1991), directed by and starring Mel Brooks.
- *Tokyo Godfathers* (2003), an anime directed by Satoshi Kon.
- *Into the Wild* (2007), directed by Sean Penn, based on Jon Krakauer's non-fiction book about Christopher McCandless.
- *Resurrecting the Champ* (2007), starring Samuel L. Jackson and Josh Hartnett, directed by Rod Lurie.
- *Kit Kittredge: An American Girl* (2008), starring Abigail Breslin, Chris O'Donnell, Julia Ormond and Max Thieriot. Directed by Patricia Rozema.
- *Hobo with a Shotgun* (2011), an exploitation film directed by Jason Eisener and written by John Davies, starring Rutger Hauer as a vigilante hobo.
- *The Muppets* (2011), the film features a character named Hobo Joe (played by Zach Galifianakis) and some Whatnot hoboes. They later appeared in the sequel *Muppets Most Wanted* (2014).
- *Man of Steel* (2013) depicts Clark Kent living as a homeless itinerant worker before ultimately taking the mantle of Superman and finding work as a reporter at the *Daily Planet*.
- Many animated cartoons depict hoboes as main or secondary characters, hobo-related activities such as traveling by train, with a bindle, or in the company of hoboes. For example, Warner Brothers' *Box Car Blues* (1930) with Bosko, *Hobo Gadget Band* (1939), *Mouse Wreckers* (1948), and *8 Ball Bunny* (1950) with Bugs Bunny, and MGM's *Henpecked Hoboes* (1946) with George and Junior in their first appearance.

Music

Artists

Musicians known for hobo songs include: Tim Barry, Baby Gramps, Railroad Earth, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Utah Phillips, Jimmie Rodgers, Seasick Steve, and Boxcar Willie.

Songs

Examples of hobo songs include:

- "Be a Hobo" by Moondog

- "Big Rock Candy Mountain" by Harry McClintock, recorded by various artists including Burl Ives, Tom Waits, Lisa Loeb, Baby Gramps, The Restarts and Harry Dean Stanton.
- "Driver Pull" by Tim Barry
- "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum" recorded by Harry McClintock, Al Jolson, and others
- "Hard Travelin'" and "Hobo's Lullaby" by Woody Guthrie
- "Here Comes Your Man" by the Pixies is about hoboes travelling on trains in California and dying because of earthquakes.[41]
- "Hobo" by The Hackensaw Boys
- "Hobo Bill", "I Ain't Got No Home" and "Mysteries of a Hobo's Life" by Cisco Houston
- "Hobo Bill's Last Ride" by Jimmy Rogers,[42] also recorded by Manfred Mann's Earth Band
- "Hobo Blues" and "The Hobo" by John Lee Hooker
- "Hobo Chang Ba" by Captain Beefheart
- "Hobo Flats" by Oliver Nelson
- "Hobo Flats" by Count Basie
- "Hobo Jungle" by The Band
- "Hobo Humpin' Slobo Babe" by Whale (band)
- "Hobo Kinda Man" by Lynyrd Skynyrd
- "Hobo, You Can't Ride This Train" by Louis Armstrong
- "The Hobo" by Merle Haggard
- "The Hobo Song" by John Prine also covered by Johnny Cash
- "The Hobo Song" by Jack Bonus which was covered by Jerry Garcia's bluegrass group, Old & In the Way
- "The Hobo Song" by Kevin Roth from the Shining Time Station's Christmas special, '*Tis a Gift*
- "Hobo's Lullaby" (a.k.a. "Weary Hobo"), written by Goebel Reeves, recorded by various artists, including Woody Guthrie, Arlo Guthrie, Emmylou Harris, Pete Seeger, The Kingston Trio, and Ramblin' Jack Eliot
- "Hobo's Meditation", written by Jimmie Rodgers, recorded by Linda Ronstadt on the album *Trio*
- "Hobos on Parade" by Shannon Wright
- "Homeless Brother" by Don McLean
- "Hopscotch Willie" by Stephen Malkmus
- "I Am a Lonesome Hobo", "Only a Hobo" and "Ramblin' Gamblin' Willie" by Bob Dylan
- "I Take a Lot of Pride in What I Am" by Merle Haggard
- "Jack Straw" by Robert Hunter and Bob Weir
- "Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet" a recording of a hobo singing on a London street, by composer Gavin Bryars.
- "King of the Road" by Roger Miller
- "Kulkurin Valssi" (Hobo Waltz) by Arthur Kylander
- "Lännen lokari" (Western Logger) by Hiski Salomaa
- "Last of the Hobo Kings" by Mary Gauthier
- "Like a Hobo" by Charlie Winston
- "Mary Lane" by Fred Eaglesmith
- "Morning Glory" by Tim Buckley lyrics by Larry Beckett
- "My Traveling Star" by James Taylor
- "Never Tire of the Road" by Andy Irvine

- "Orange Claw Hammer" by Captain Beefheart which contains the lyric: "I'm on the bum where the hobos run, the air breaks with filthy chatter."
- "Papa Hobo" and "Hobo's Blues" by Paul Simon
- "Ramblin' Man" by Hank Williams Sr.
- "Sergeant Small" by Andy Irvine
- "Streets of London" by Ralph McTell
- "Waiting for a Train" by Jimmie Rodgers[43]
- "Western Hobo" by The Carter Family

Stage

- *King of the Hobos* (2014), a one-man musical that premiered at Emerging Artists Theatre in New York City, is centered around the death of James Eads How, known during his lifetime as the "Millionaire Hobo".[44]

Television

- *Criminal Minds* (season 4), episode 5 "Catching Out" (2008)
- *Mad Men* (season 1), episode 8, "The Hobo Code" (2007)
- *Mannix* (season 6), episode 22 "To Quote a Dead Man" (1973)
- *The Littlest Hobo*: long-running Lassie-esque franchise about a roving dog that lives the hobo lifestyle
- In *The Simpsons* episode "The Old Man and the Key", Grampa explains hobo symbols to Bart. In another episode, the Simpsons meet a hobo who tells them American folktales in exchange for a spongebath.
- *Shameless* (Season 9), Episode 10 and 11. Frank Gallagher becomes part of a hobo competition, a competition looking for the best hobo in Chicago.

See also

- Freight Train Riders of America, a gang of rogue freight train riders originally formed by Vietnam veterans
- Freighthopping
- Hobo nickel, an art form associated with hoboes
- Hobo (typeface), designed by Morris Fuller Benton for American Type Founders in 1910
- Kirby, Texas, the "hobo capital of Texas"
- Swagman, roughly the equivalent in Australia
- Wobbly lingo, the jargon of the Industrial Workers of the World
- Train surfing

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